

# Christian Education.

## SERMON

BEFORE THE

General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in  
the United States of America,

AT

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH,  
IN THE CITY OF RICHMOND,

ON

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1859,

BY

THE RIGHT REV. J. H. OTEY, D. D., LL. D.  
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF TENNESSEE.

RICHMOND:

PRINTED AT THE ENQUIRER BOOK AND JOB OFFICE.

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COLLECT,

FOR THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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Keep, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

1809-1865

# S E R M O N .

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ST. MARK, X, 15.

“Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”

IF the only acceptable or admissible way, in which an adult person can receive the kingdom of God, be as a little child receives it, the inference we think is unavoidable, that little children are proper subjects of that kingdom. Upon this declaration of our Lord and Redeemer, in connection with the context, an unanswerable argument might be constructed, in favor of the lawfulness of infant baptism. But we propose to follow a different line of remark on this occasion, and to use these words of our Saviour as suggestive of a topic, than which few others can more fitly claim the serious consideration of a Christian assembly, or the anxious reflections of American citizens, or the deep and pious thoughts of the right reverend fathers, ministers and brethren composing this council of the church. It is, *Christian education, or the training of the young in the way of holiness*, which forms our theme for remark.

This is not a subject, which may or ought to awaken interest, only in the bosoms of Christian parents. Its range is wide enough to embrace all the families of the land: and

its relations extend to many other interests than those merely of domestic life. It is the boast of our countrymen, that their social well-being is not dependent for its source nor for its continuance on the circumstances which may surround an individual.

The term of a sovereign's life, or the state of his health, or the moral disposition of the heir apparent, never enters into our anxieties or speculations respecting the happiness of ourselves, our families, or our country. But we should remember, for it concerns us all to know, that though the succession of power among us be silent, gradual and unobserved, the human exponent, so to speak, is yet transient in its duration and susceptible of change. Many of us will probably live to see the sceptre of our civil condition transferred, and the destinies of this nation, social and religious, intellectual and moral, public and individual, pass into the hands of the little beings whose minds are now occupied with the toys of childhood. The next race of the sovereign people may be as degenerate as the successor of an absolute monarch. Nay, the voice of history proclaims the grave and impressive lesson, that the glories of republics have been evanescent—that their energies have become effete and languid, in the transmission through fewer generations than those of some hereditary dynasties. They seem to resemble those vegetable productions which bloom more magnificently, and bear a richer fruitage, but arrive at earlier decay and decrepitude. How shall we, on whom the care of ours is now incumbent, maintain the vital principle with undiminished healthfulness and vigor, that it may flourish for us,



and for those who follow after us? There is but one method, and that method is obvious; it is easy, and it is secure, if faithfully pursued. Here, within our reach, under our almost unlimited control, and in a ductile state, is the very material on whose shape the stability of our institutions must depend. The alternative is before us either to leave that material to be moulded by external circumstances highly unfavorable, or to give it form by that plastic touch of *education*, whose moral impress the droppings of time can never efface, nor any stroke of accident destroy. "The child is father to the man." The foundation of character and destiny of every individual element of that rational multitude whose mind will sway the world of thirty years hence, will be laid permanently and indestructibly before it has attained the twelfth year of its being. Subsequent influences may strengthen or impair that foundation, but they never can displace it. For the characters of men do not result from their own investigations: the patterns are not selected and approved by a mature judgment: they are formed by the combined development of those associations and sympathies of childhood, from whose abiding influence no reasonings or efforts of mature years will ever entirely emancipate them. You must communicate, or you must withhold from that wave of human society which follows after you, and will soon rise in your place, those principles whose infusion will make it pure, and whose absence will cause it to spread bitterness, corruption and desolation wherever it rolls.

What are those principles, and how are they to be communicated? We have said that the rising generation must

be *educated*; but we do not use the word in its popular acceptance. We never employ it in the degraded sense, now so current, which excludes the discipline of the *heart*; and we now use it, without reference to merely intellectual culture; our present concern being with that sort of education which improves and exalts the character, not that which fills the memory and enlarges the understanding. I know that it is a cherished idea in this country, that sound morals and extended knowledge are inseparable as cause and effect; and that the consciences of men are enlightened to discern evil, and armed to resist it, by merely storing their minds with learning. *Virtue* and *intelligence* are the strong pillars on which rests the social edifice of our country; and to make society virtuous, we must make men intelligent. This is the favorite maxim reiterated by the lips of every social reformer of the age—by every aspirant to popular favor and political distinction. With much of truth in the aphorism, there are mingled with it elements which in their practical development are exceedingly dangerous, and make it in fact the most perilous sophism of our age and country. We meet with it every where; we hear it almost daily in conversation: it abounds in all the secular, and in most of the religious journals which circulate through the land—it is assumed in popular addresses—lurks in legislative enactments, and is sanctioned by the erection of seminaries of learning, which seem intended for beings purely intellectual, callous to all passions and destitute of all propensities—institutions where every mental faculty is tilled with minute and systematic industry, while the whole moral nature is left a wil-

derness, in which the most noxious weeds may spring up and multiply. Knowledge, knowledge alone, is proclaimed to be the unfailing protector of all rights—the kind and nursing parent of all virtues—the certain cure for every malady that can infest human society.

Now we hold this to be a sophism false in theory, and fatal in experiment, whose increasing prevalence is just cause of alarm to reflecting minds, and which it is the duty of all who stand responsible for the interests of their fellow-beings, both temporal and eternal, to resist loudly and strenuously. As an instrument to promote physical and mental enjoyment, knowledge has genuine worth, amply sufficient to attract the pursuit of men, and afford matter for rational approval without making pretensions which are absurd and dangerous. That intelligence is a lever which properly applied, may sustain and elevate the public morals, is an obvious verity: but it has no moral character, and no moral preference of its own. It may be abused and may be employed in the work of demolition, as well as of construction. Its results derive their moral tendency from the moral agency by which the instrument is wielded: that is, the moral effects of intelligence depend upon the very circumstances, of which this sophism affirms them to be decisive. It is servant to that, of which it is said to be master. It is the clay, instead of the potter, in the formation of the social character. Show me by reasoning, or by experiment, the *sequence* which is claimed to exist between intellectual wealth and moral purity. Take a child and teach him the truths of mathematical science. Will you thus make him abhor fraud and falsehood? Teach

him natural philosophy, and will you thereby extinguish selfishness and malice, or infuse purity of thought and modesty of demeanor? Teach him the abstractions of moral science, and will you thereby impart the will and the power to perform moral duties? Surely not. But now try a different process. Let him be removed from the contact of every irreligious impulse and association. Let him be environed as much as possible by "whatsoever things are pure, just, true, honest, lovely and of good report." Carry him to the Word of God for a standard of morals, perfect, unalterable and eternal, founded not on the speculations of man, but on the *dictum* of Omniscience—send him to the throne of grace, and thither let parent and teacher repair *with* him by their example, and *for* him by their prayers. And what results may you then rationally anticipate? In the human character, instead of the antagonist principles of intelligence and vice mingling harmoniously to make the compound more offensive, you infuse the religious principle, and every thing gross is neutralized and precipitated—every thing noxious is expelled, and the character acquires a permanent purity and transparency. Now, what is true of the individual element must be true of the uniform mass. For a people without intelligence, the range of physical and intellectual enjoyment must be circumscribed: but the purity of morals, the authority of the laws, that fireside happiness which, after all, is the most precious of social treasures, need not be impaired, nor jeopardized. Nay, those tracts of man's history on which both reason and imagination dwell with the most unalloyed complacency, are not those most resplendent with

the illumination of letters, and polished by the arts of civilized life. It is in communities where ignorance and poverty have been ennobled by a pure and beautiful simplicity of manners, that we must look for the most illustrious examples of patriotism, and the most lovely portraiture of domestic peace. But what would be the condition of a community destitute of religion? This is a picture which requires to be exhibited in a strong light, and seriously pondered: a society in which religion is supplanted in its peculiar functions by a power utterly incompetent for their performance! Let not your imaginations wander far away to savage tribes, in search of an actual example of the conditions of the hypothesis. The most blinded and depraved, whose abode is marked on the map of any continent, or whose character is portrayed in the annals of any age, are not without religion. God hath not left them entirely without witness; and we hesitate not to affirm, that in the most horrible and distorted creed, considered as a *system*, that ever deluded mankind, there are yet fountains of truth, and plants of nourishment, and fences of beneficial restraint over the corrupt propensities of man, which render it far better adapted to his moral nature than the sickly and sterile wastes of a libertine atheism.

We must suppose a case: and in order to conceive the effects of a perfect religious darkness in their most shocking and fearful manifestations, we must come nearer home than the haunts of savage life; we must suppose a case where the energies of mind are the most powerful, and the lights of civilization are the most brilliant, and the inmost pene-



tralia of the shrine of knowledge are freely and generally approached. In such a country, suppose that the hearts of the people should suddenly become callous to the power, and their eyes blinded to the light of religion—that every religious institution should be overthrown—that every religious restraint should be cast loose; that every religious impression which hearts the most abandoned and dissolute now receive from the contact of sacred things, were effaced entirely; that the mild radiance which christianity now diffuses over the whole surface of society, should be curtained from the world; so that Christian example should have no weight, Christian sentiments exercise no purifying and elevating control, Christian education be robbed of the restraining influences which no lapse of time and no degree of wickedness can now avail to sunder; so that all these refined and intelligent people should rely for their moral guidance entirely on intellectual light, and for moral support, entirely on intellectual strength; checked by no fears but worldly fears; moved by no inducements but sublunary inducements; bound by no laws but human laws—having no desires or thoughts but such as are of the earth, earthy—what picture would such a community present to our contemplation! Like the artist who started back horror-stricken from the picture which his own pencil had painted, we should shrink from the contemplation of scenes which no language could depict—no tongue describe. We should behold the torches of intelligence elevated not to enlighten, but brandished to consume—the ardor of enterprise rushing not to the tasks of industry, but of plunder—the vigor of

thought strained not to construct, but to ruin—the attractions of art displayed not to refine, but to pollute and deprave—political freedom enjoyed not for security, but abused to the destruction of both civil and personal rights—every human emotion centred in self—every barrier of law overleaped—every moral restraint relaxed or severed—every noble sentiment extinct—every vicious propensity rioting in the openness of day—nothing criminal but weakness—nothing wretched but innocence—every tie that binds man to man, sundered—every principle of justice disregarded—every cry for mercy stifled—every temple of piety violated—every defence of purity torn down and trampled under foot, and every sanctuary of the affections invaded and desecrated. Such we may conceive to be the faintly-shadowed but shocking scene of moral desolation—of brutal degradation, which any civilized people would exhibit, if its religion were abolished and its intelligence were retained and raised to the highest point of attainment. The greater their intelligence, the more hopeless and abandoned would be their wretchedness; for every blessing of civilization would be transformed into a curse. Every instrument that now improves and adorns society, would become a weapon to pierce its vitals. The truth of the matter, as obvious to reason, under the guiding light of revelation, and as demonstrated by history, is precisely the reverse of the popular idea. Knowledge has never preceded virtue, and it has never survived it; and whenever the pure principle of virtue has ceased to be mingled with the oil of intelligence, the lamp has expired in the corrupt atmosphere which its

own foul effluvium had created. Knowledge will vanish away, but virtue or charity never faileth.

I have dwelt the longer on this matter, because the error I have attempted to expose is a prevalent and dangerous one; of whose results, unless very soon checked, this nation will in a few years be made lamentably, mournfully and wofully sensible.\* It is advocated sometimes explicitly and often impliedly by men who are set as watchmen for the defence of society from the incursions of moral and religious evil: and yet it virtually admits the claims of infidelity. It is precisely the principle which was preached by skeptics of the last century, and was in truth the fruitful parent of that direful progeny of evils which the world witnessed in the excesses and horrors of the French revolution. Let the claims of secular knowledge be advanced on their proper grounds. There is room enough for zeal, and motive enough for exertion in that cause, without elevating intelligence to the post which religion alone is adequate to maintain—without supplanting the wisdom of Christ, who teaches us that we must become as little children in order to enter his kingdom, for that knowledge of the world which puffs up, and nourishes pride instead of humility—without substituting the light of reason for the dictates of conscience—without commending the diffusion of intelligence as something more important to the interests of society and indivi-

\* Public sentiment not only originates the law, but actually controls its operation. Hence the prevalence of a healthy moral sentiment is indispensable to the due execution of the laws. Let the moral tone of society become universally or generally depraved, and all vitality is gone from the laws, and there is no power in this nation to execute them.



dual happiness, than the cultivation of charity and the fear of God. That healthy moral sentiment, which, as a perennial fountain sends forth fertilizing streams through all the fields of human action, and imparts vigor to every enterprise of benevolence, springs from a "faith in God, which works by love, purifies the heart and overcomes the world." The genial warmth which spreads its vivifying and fructifying influences over the whole scene of Christian efforts, extending now

"From Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand ;  
From Afric's sunny fountains to China's teeming land,"

is an emanation from the "bright Sun of Righteousness," and not from the glimmering taper of this world's wisdom. In a word, the Bible is the text book of the science of the heart, and the lessons of wisdom which it imparts are of more value, I do not hesitate to affirm, than all the secular knowledge gained by the people of this powerful confederacy of states, in the many thousands of seminaries throughout the land, and from which its teachings are excluded, six days in every week.

But vast as are the moral and social benefits of early religious culture, they constitute not the chief motives to encouragement in the work of training the young. Children have souls to be saved, as well as duties to perform to society. To those whose thoughts are exercised seriously about the things of another life, the chief and engrossing subject of anxiety is, not how children may be made respectable and prosperous during their abode on earth, but how

they may become fellow citizens of the saints, and fitted for the society of heaven. And however their right of baptism may be questioned, the ground is fearlessly assumed, that if all the conditions of the covenant are faithfully met and discharged by those who have the care of them, we may as certainly and as confidently look for a blessing on efforts for their spiritual improvement, as for the full development of their faculties and powers in other things. To the labor of Christian education in this highest view, we have the most animating encouragement. The conviction of success, it is true, is an exercise of our faith, and not a part of our knowledge; the responsibility for their own souls will ultimately devolve on the children themselves, and God only knows how they will sustain it. Our present efforts and prayers will not be alone effectual: but that intercessory prayer and Christian education are means through which the gifts of the spirit are very freely bestowed, and that the faithful use of these means affords the strongest encouragement for expecting it, is what no Christian can reasonably doubt. We must not forget, indeed, that the whole work of religion, is not performed by the inculcation of truth and the culture of moral sensibility. We know and lament that there are too many to be found, whose minds have been enlightened by the truth, softened by the spirit, and embellished by the ornaments of christianity, and who yet have never received the Gospel as the principle of a new and holy life; and it will be found further, that this perilous and unhappy state is owing simply to an obstinate refusal of the means of grace and the resistance they make to the author of all

grace. Still, while we perform our duty in conveying religious instruction to the mind of the child, we know that his heart will be much better prepared hereafter to receive and profit by the influences of the Spirit of God.

Truths instilled in childhood live forever in the memory. They are interwoven with all the sensibilities of the soul. They are the fortress of the conscience, not impregnable, but indestructible. They furnish the mind with chords which never cease to vibrate to the touch of faithful expostulation. They are an inextinguishable spark, which, after being seemingly smothered under a mass of corruption, are often revived, by providential circumstances, to a pure flame of piety. We cannot pluck up the *roots* of evil, but we may prune and repress its developments. We may soften the soil in which heavenly seed must germinate, and make it pervious to the dews of divine grace. The work is noble—the hopes are strong and scriptural—the duty is imperative and the machinery to be employed is all of heavenly temper and divine appointment.

From the days of the apostles downward, the church's care of little children, has been assumed as an eminent duty. Timothy, from a child, was instructed in the Holy Scriptures. We read of certain persons called *helpers*—as Priscilla, Aquila and Urbane, who are reasonably presumed to have held the office of *catechist*, which was universal in the early ages of the church: and ever since the reformation it has been the prescribed duty of the ministers of the church, “diligently on Sundays to instruct and examine the children” of the parish in the *catechism*, prepared for that special purpose, and

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which contains in itself perhaps the most complete summary of Christian doctrines and duties ever brought together in the same compass. Bring before your minds the immense multitude of ministers, and catechists and teachers employed in this work, wherever the seas thunder round the world—or winds sweep over the habitations of men—the countless numbers of children collected weekly together to be taught. Think of the prayers, the admonitions, the lessons in which this unnumbered mass of living and immortal beings are every Sunday engaged. Reflect on the pious impressions which these holy occupations must make on instructors and children—their accumulating knowledge of divine things—their diligent investigation and explanation of religious truth—this employment of holy time, in holy things, when that time might be misemployed in the things of the world—the rebounding influence of pious children upon their parents and others—the amount of moral and religious sentiment thus communicated—the silent but sure operation of that sentiment imperceptibly finding its way to millions of hearts, and insensibly moulding the temper and controlling the conduct of those millions of accountable and rational living beings, and these in their turn influencing other millions to come after—and can you conceive, by any effort of mind, a moral spectacle of more imposing grandeur and soul-stirring sublimity? Are we not justified in offering the prayer, and in indulging the hope, that the incense thus rising to the throne of God, may, by his blessing, burst forth over the guilty millions of our world, without limit and without restraint, in heavenly benediction—its sanctifying influences

be felt in all human institutions—mingle itself with all social elements—regulate all the pulsations of feeling—consecrate all political movements—exalt all the productions of science and learning—purify every intellectual and moral enterprise, and communicate heaven's peace and gladness to every nation, every family and every heart? Can we employ a more powerful consideration to move the church, its ministry and its members to undertake and vigorously prosecute this glorious work commanded by Christ, blessed of God, and indispensable to man?

“Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”

To a Christian mind, the world is one great seminary, in which immortal souls are to be trained for higher and nobler scenes. The eyes of the infant are opened to the external world in a true *primary* school—a school devised and established by infinite wisdom. It is the *family* institution. Children have souls and bodies, and there they both may be cared for. They are connected with *two* worlds, and there they may be trained for both. *Two* persons are appointed by *Divine Providence* to perform this task of *training*. *Two* are united to the little and dependent being by indissoluble ties—*two* teachers, whose love no restiveness of the child can alienate—whose assiduity no weariness can overcome—to whom all sacrifices for his good are a pleasure—who receive a reward in their own hearts for every effort. Perfect dependence on one side, and perfect love and sympathy on the other, combine to give almost omnipotent force to the instruction which is imparted.

The *family circle* is the *nursery* for Heaven. There the infant heart is moulded in its moral sensibilities—there the sympathies and affections all germinate and bud—and there all the ties are formed and strengthen daily, which bind the little pupil to man and to God—to time and to eternity. In secret from the world's prying gaze, under the eyes of these only whom God appoints, the tender plant grows up, soon to be transplanted to the Paradise of God, or to be cast out and withered forever. There, in the family circle, is not only the home of the affections—the fountain of earthly bliss—not only the source of social security and national prosperity—it is the birthplace of man's character, and of his eternal destiny! All other institutions are of human origin, and may be changed or abolished; but this which God has instituted, blessed and sanctified, may not be touched by the presuming wisdom or the rash hand of man, without incurring the entailed curse of Heaven. All other instruction may be voluntary or purchased: but from this there can be no shrinking and no release, without inevitable punishment, and that of the direst kind. The little plaything which smiling parents dandle on the knee, has a thinking, feeling soul, which must think and feel, forever, in Heaven or in Hell. Into their hands it was given, and at their hands it will be required again. God has established the school, appointed the teachers, and commanded them to train the pupils whom he commits to their care, in his nurture and admonition. If this trust be betrayed, think what your feelings must be, when your children shall come weeping around your dying beds, and you stretch forth your trem-



bling hands to bid them a last adieu, and you shall feel their kind and warm embrace no more! Think how you will answer for your neglect to God, when your own soul shall have passed "the grave, and gate of death," and eternity shall have closed in, with all its dark and changeless solemnities, on the spirits of the saved and of the lost.

Now, unto God the Father, &c.





## COLLECT,

FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

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O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy church : and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness ; through Jesus Christ our Lord ! *Amen.*

